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STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR X0XX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Gaza Operation

Key stories in the media:

Leading media reported that yesterday two more Israelis were killed by Hamas rocket fire -Q a woman in Ashdod and a soldier in Nahal Oz, in the vicinity of Gaza. Seven Israelis were wounded in the Hamas attacks. Israel Radio reported that 10 Palestinians were killed in an IAF raid on the Hamas government compound in Gaza. So far three

hundred and sixty Palestinians have been killed in the IDF operation. Over the past few days all media have underlined verbal clashes between Egypt and other Muslim nations, as well as the killing of an Egyptian officer by Hamas. All media reported that the IDF is bracing for an IDF ground offensive. Israel Radio quoted the international daily Al-Hayat citing sources in Cairo as saying that Ankara and Cairo have warned that Hizbullah will attack Israel if the latter starts a ground offensive in Gaza. Yediot quoted an Israeli military source as saying yesterday that Israel will not let itself be dragged into a conflict with Hizbullah and that it will not initiate any move against Lebanon.

HaQaretz quoted PM Ehud Olmert as saying yesterday at a meeting with FM Tzipi Livni and DM Ehud Barak: QIsrael will use an iron fist against Hamas but will apply a soft hand toward the [Palestinian] population.Q Leading media quoted Olmert as saying that Israel will no longer consider a cease-fire proposal. Israel Radio quoted Israeli Ambassador to the UN Gabriela Shalev as saying yesterday in an interview with the AP that the goal of the operation was to destroy Hamas and that it would continue as long as necessary until Hamas was dismantled. Shalev stressed that Israel would not agree to a return to the previous cease-fire conditions and that it was demanding guarantees and commitments that Hamas would not fire rockets at its citizens anymore.

Israel Radio reported that Egypt has developed a cease-fire formula with Turkish leaders that includes the opening of crossings to Gaza.

HaQaretz quoted Foreign Ministry sources as saying yesterday that the Qinternational hourglassQ would allow Israel to continue its operation, at most, until January 5. HaQaretz reported that tonight France and Britain will present a proposal aimed at forcing a cease-fire on Israel and Hamas Q initially, a two-day calm. HaQaretz quoted a Foreign Ministry source as saying that the QBritish are promoting a very bad proposal for Israel.

The Jerusalem Post reported that yesterday U.S. Senator Arlen Specter carried a message from PM Olmert to Syrian President Bashar Assad despite SyriaQs announcement it had broken off its indirect talks with Israel. Major media reported yesterday that Turkey suspended mediation between Israel and Syria.

HaQaretz and other media reported that IsraelQs three principal ministers agreed yesterday to allow Qatar to airlift humanitarian aid to Gaza in the coming days. Several aircraft from the Persian Gulf nation will land in Israel, and from there food and medicine will be transferred by truck to Gaza. Israel Radio reported that a boat carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza and an Israel Navy patrol collided yesterday when the former tried to dodge the latter.

Leading media reported that Arab cabinet minister Raleb Majadele protested against the operation and boycotted the cabinet session. PM Olmert subsequently refused to let him go on a trip to Jordan.

HaQaretz quoted prominent liberal writer Amos Oz as saying in the Italian daily Corriere Della Sera that Hamas is responsible for the latest flare-up, but that a cease-fire must be reached.

Gaza Operation:

Summary:

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: QFor now, Israel enjoys the support of the U.S. administration. But as January 20 approaches, the date of Barack Obama's inauguration, Israel must be well Qpost-Gaza.

Washington correspondent Natasha Mozgovaya wrote in Ha'aretz: QIf the operation continues, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict threatens to harm the new U.S. president even before he utters the first world of his swearing-in on January 20.

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the

popular, pluralist Maariv: Q[A possible option besides a cease-fire would be]: Let there be a clear balance of terror, let them know that that if they fire, they will be met with such a powerful blow that their ears will ring for a long time afterwards.

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot: QWith all the enthusiasm over the black smoke forming over Gaza, [Israeli politicians] tend to forget the operation's goal: Forcing Hamas to agree to a cease-fire on terms that Israel is willing to meet.

Prominent liberal author David Grossman wrote on page one of Ha'aretz: QIsrael's leaders know well that given the situation in the Gaza Strip, it will be very hard to reach a total and unequivocal military solution.... Therefore, stop. Hold your fire.

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: QIf Israel can deflate Hamas, it will be advancing an Arab interest as much as its own citizens' security.

Block Quotes:

I. "Knowing When to End It"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (12/30): QFor now, Israel enjoys the support of the U.S. administration. But as January 20 approaches, the date of Barack Obama's inauguration, Israel must be well Qpost-Gaza.Q Don't think that Obama will focus exclusively on the economic crisis as his first priority. A president can take a stance on several issues at once -- and we don't know what his stance will be on this war and all its ramifications if we fail to end it at the right time. There is no doubt that Barak is aware of all the possible complications. And no one understands better than he that while it is impossible to make Hamas disappear and it is impossible to completely destroy its missile-launching capabilities, it is possible to destroy its motivation to use them. Just as he knew when and how to begin the operation, we must hope that he will also know when to end it.

II. "First Complication before the Inauguration"

Washington correspondent Natasha Mozgovaya wrote in Ha'aretz (12/30): QThe last thing the new [U.S.] administration needs is escalation in the Middle East. The operation has only begun, but its first days have brought no good tidings: Together with the freeze of the talks with the Palestinian Authority, the disappearance of the Syrian track, and growing fury in the Arab world, this might leave Obama's diplomacy scorched earth.... The pictures of the bodies from Gaza, broadcast worldwide, have started gnawing into the credit [Obama] has won in the Arab world. Ultimately, if the operation continues, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict threatens to harm the new U.S. president even before he utters the first word of his swearing-in on January 20.

III. "Towards a Balance of Terror with Hamas"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv (12/30): QIsrael did not declare that its goal was to topple the Hamas government in this operation, and it's good that it didn't. But Qalong the way,Q there is an opportunity here.... How will it end? In a new truce agreement, or without it. What is known as a de facto truce. That, incidentally is what the decision-makers in Israel would prefer. No more agreements with Hamas. Let there be a clear balance of terror, let them know that that if they fire, they will be met with such a powerful blow that their ears will ring for a long time afterwards. When will it end? We don't know. The security cabinet ministers approved a lengthy operation of many stages. We are only at the end of the first stage. The other stages have also been approved -- unless it is decided to cancel them. At the moment, we are continuing as usual. On the other hand, some think that the proposal of French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner yesterday, in a phone conversation with Ehud Barak, for a lull of 48 hours in strikes for Qhumanitarian purposesQ could be a good ladder. Israel would stop its activity for two days to allow the Palestinians to remove the injured and receive help. If, in these two days, Hamas does not launch rockets,

we can close up shop. And have quiet for a long time. If they do, we continue as usual. In the meantime, none of the people at the top (Olmert and Barak) are listening to this idea.

IV. "Remember 2006"

Senior columnist Nahum Barnea wrote in the mass-circulation, pluralist Yediot Aharonot (12/30): QEmbarking on the operation was justified, even if belated. However, past experience has taught us that a successful beginning does not necessarily ensure a fitting end: The classic example, and not the only one in our history, is the gap between the opening act of the Second Lebanon War and its closing act.... I would like to believe that Barak is talking about the fighting lasting a long time only in order to convince Hamas that Israel did not embark on this operation holding a stopwatch. The more Hamas is convinced that Israel has no time limitations, the quicker it will be to ask for a cease-fire. Declarations about the operation continuing are psychological warfare. The problem is that politicians tend to forget who they're trying to trick, the enemy or their people. What begins as a deception ruse for the enemy ends with self-deception.... With all the enthusiasm over the black smoke forming over Gaza, [Israeli politicians] tend to forget the operation's goal: Forcing Hamas to agree to a cease-fire on terms that Israel is willing to meet. That is the goal that Olmert, Livni and Barak and the overwhelming majority of Israelis agree on: Not occupation and not toppling. The moment that Hamas agrees to a cease-fire, the operation is supposed to end. This is also a lesson that should have been learned from the mistakes of 2006: In war, you have to know how to end on time.

IV. QStop. Hold Your Fire

Prominent liberal author David Grossman wrote on page one of Ha'aretz (12/30): QIsrael's leaders know well that given the situation in the Gaza Strip, it will be very hard to reach a total and unequivocal military solution.... Therefore, stop. Hold your fire. Try for once to act against the usual response, in contrast to the lethal logic of belligerence. There will always be a chance to start firing again. War, as Barak said about two weeks ago, will not run away. International support for Israel will not be damaged, and will even grow, if we show calculated restraint and invite the international and Arab community to intervene and mediate. It is true that Hamas will thus receive a respite with which to reorganize, but it has had long years to do so, and two more days will not really make a difference. And such a calculated lull might change the way Hamas responds to the situation. The response could even give it an honorable way out of the trap it has set for itself.

And one more, unavoidable thought: Had we adopted this attitude in July 2006, after Hizbullah abducted the soldiers, had we stopped then, after our first response, and declared we were holding our fire for a day or two to mediate and calm things down, the reality today might be entirely different. This is also a lesson the government should learn from that war. In fact, it might be the most important lesson.

VI. QArab Elites vs. Hamas

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (12/30): QNasrallah is half-right. Arab elites suffer from a sort of split personality disorder. Even as they are trying to pull Hamas's chestnuts out of the fire by pressing Washington to lean on Israel to back off, they know that Hamas (like Hizbullah and the Muslim Brotherhood) threatens not just their own regimes, but political development in the Arab world. If only the Jordanian and Saudi monarchs, Gulf emirs and the Egyptian president would stand up to the Islamists. How? They should be incrementally fostering transparent government and the rule of law, and socializing their masses to the idea of tolerance and majority rule while respecting the minority. That would promote political institution-building and social stability. The Arab elites need to offer their people an alternative to Islamist extremism. They could begin by redefining what it means to be pro-Palestinian and dissociating the Palestinian cause from anti-Israel rejectionism. In this context, if Israel can deflate Hamas, it will be advancing an Arab interest as much as its own citizens' security.